

If these (Martian) rocks could talk

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by Patrick Gasda

Finding the element boron might not seem exciting, but if you find it on Mars and you're interested in alien life, it's a big deal. Like manganese, another element that NASA's Curiosity rover discovered in surprising abundance on Mars, boron has a lot to say about the habitability of the Red Planet.

Understanding how these elements got there and the implications to our search for life on Mars is part of Curiosity's mission. A rolling laboratory that has been creeping across Gale Crater for four and a half years, Curiosity bristles with drills, tools and instruments for studying the chemistry of rocks and soil. It's all about answering a simple question: Could past or present conditions on Mars support life?

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